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## THE DIRECT METHOD IN TEACHING LATIN— SOME OBJECTIONS

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It was my privilege to attend Dr. Rouse's classes at the Columbia Summer Session of 1912 and observe his skill in teaching Latin by the direct method. He taught without the aid of a textbook and, though a born Englishman, with little English. He is a trained teacher of experience and an artist at his work. He made his subject glow with interest, and one was made to wonder that a language considered so dead could be made so alive. He spoke it freely and idiomatically. In teaching, he used everything that came to his hand. Blackboard sketches made in the presence of the class, pictures hung on the wall, cheese, balls, jokes, mistakes, interruptions—all were made to serve him.

He entered the classroom smiling and exclaimed, "*Salvete, omnes pueri et puellae,*" and immediately the response from the class came back, "*Salve, tu quoque.*" Then from the teacher, "*Septima, surge,*" and as Septima arose she said, "*Surgo,*" while her classmates with a gesture toward her said, "*Surgis,*" and the teacher with a gesture toward her said to the class, "*Surgit.*" On he went with "*Sta,*" "*Exi,*" "*Ambula,*" "*Ini,*" "*Veni,*" "*Sede,*" "*Conside,*" while the pupil always did as she was commanded and told in Latin what she was doing. Then came the plural of all these verbs, and in two lessons the class had learned the present tense of all the conjugations and several of the compounds together with several nouns, and not a word had been said about conjugations or endings. These words were reviewed every day. Some of the pronouns were added to the list of words learned, and in a few more lessons the fable of the crow and the fox was taught. Rarely had an English word been used, and then only when it was announced that English was to be spoken for a short time. When the Latin was resumed, the spell was never broken by an English word.

After hearing him for six weeks and observing the results with the class, most of those who were there left for their own schools wildly enthusiastic to try out his method. I came away thinking that our old method of teaching Latin belongs in Mr. Dooley's theory of education when he said, "It doesn't make much difference what ye teach children, so long as it is disagreeable to them." In almost every number of the *Classical Weekly* issued since then some teacher has given his experience in teaching, or rather attempting to teach, Latin by the direct method, for few seem to have succeeded. Yet I firmly believe that our Latin teaching has been improved by the experiment, and that pupils taken at the right age and taught properly will find Latin a pleasure and will read it as a literature instead of laboriously translating it into poor English.

But our conditions in Arkansas are such that I doubt very much whether we are ready to undertake the teaching of Latin by the direct method. In the first place we are not prepared as teachers. One must not only have a thorough knowledge of the language, but he must be able to speak it freely. To do this will require long practice by one who was taught by the old method. It is one thing to translate a little Latin and another to think in Latin, to speak in Latin, and to read Latin. Of course, the teacher can memorize a few questions and other sentences, but when he comes to conducting a recitation all in Latin he will usually find himself lost long before his recitation period is over.

He must not only have a thorough knowledge of the language and be able to speak it, but he must be a trained and skilful teacher. A great many of our Latin teachers are not teaching Latin from choice. They studied some Latin in college, but prepared to teach some other subject. The opportunity they hoped for did not come, so they took positions as Latin teachers. They will doubtless do less harm the old way.

Then the textbooks prepared for teaching Latin by the direct method do not meet the needs of a teacher who has not been thoroughly trained in this method. The books can only suggest. They give the merest outline of the lesson and the teacher has to furnish the real body of the lesson. This he cannot do unless he speaks Latin freely and is prepared for any turn the lesson may take or for any surprise it may bring.

The time required by this method is an objection offered by some. We are expected to prepare our pupils for college Latin in three years. By the direct method the very best we can hope for is to have them ready for Caesar in this time. It is true that if they are well taught by the direct method they will read Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil in one year, but this is the year they are expected to be in college. If we succeed at all, we cannot wait until the pupil enters high school to begin his Latin. I am sure that whatever method we pursue we will have better success if we begin Latin with pupils when they are between the ages of ten and fifteen years and I am sure also that we shall fail with the direct method with pupils older than this. I state this from experience, after attempting this method with pupils of mature age who had never had any language except English.

Another objection that is offered to this method is the vocabulary. The Latin read in college and out of college is classic, while the vocabulary used in teaching the direct method must be commonplace and colloquial. "Why waste time," the critic says, "with these words which we shall not need in our Latin reading?"

Another unfavorable condition for this method is the fact that so many of our teachers remain in the same school for a short time only. No teacher can hope to succeed with the direct method without at least four years of consecutive work in the same school.

While these objections and others may be offered as reasons why we cannot yet succeed with the direct method, I believe we can use the suggestions that have come to us from this method to improve our work in teaching Latin. We can brighten our lessons with a little conversation in Latin, throwing into it the zest, naturalness, and expression that go with conversation in any other language; we can use oral lessons occasionally; we can, perhaps, after much patience, perseverance, and time, get our pupils to think a little in Latin and to read Latin instead of translating it. If we begin now in this way, it may be that after another generation or two of Latin pupils have gone into our schools as teachers they may be able to use this method successfully.